

Galatians: Freed by Christ to Follow the Spirit

Galatians 4:1-31

Key Truth

Cast out anyone who would enslave you again to legalism.

In the latter half of Galatians 3, the Apostle Paul explained that one of the reasons the Law of Moses was given was to *chase us to Christ* in the sense that the Law of Moses makes it abundantly clear that we are transgressors, we cannot live up to God's perfect and holy standard nor can we make up for all the ways we violate God's holiness and transgress His law. The purpose of the Law of Moses is to bring us to the end of ourselves; to open us up to put our faith, not in ourselves, but in Jesus Who died on the cross to pay the penalty for our transgressions and rose again to give us eternal life. When we turn from ourselves to Jesus to make us right with God we are justified, that is, God the Father declares all our sin forgiven, paid as they are by the sacrifice of Jesus. God the Father declares that we are in a right standing with Him; He accepts us and is at peace with us. All of this is what is meant by the phrase *justified by faith*. In addition, He adopts us as His sons and daughters making us rightful heirs to His inheritance. This is what the Apostle Paul celebrates at the close of Galatians 3.

Galatians 3:26–29

What is the inheritance?

It is the indwelling Holy Spirit. It is the very person of the Holy Spirit living within us! That is our inheritance as the children of God.

In Galatians 4:1-11, Paul explains it was God's plan all along to give the promised inheritance after Jesus Christ accomplished His work on the cross. Until that time, both Jews and Gentiles were slaves, but those who put their faith in Christ are set free to become sons and heirs of God. Notice as we read Galatians 4:1-11 that the Jews and Gentiles were both enslaved, but not to the same thing. To what were the Jews enslaved until the coming of Christ and to what were the Gentiles enslaved?

Galatians 4:1–11

Before the coming of Christ, the Jews were enslaved under the Law of Moses like children awaiting their inheritance. But now that Christ has come, the inheritance of the Holy Spirit is given to all who put their faith in Christ.

The Jews were enslaved under the Law of Moses until faith in Christ came. The Gentile believers were enslaved, not to the Law of Moses, but to idolatry. But when they trusted in the cross of Christ, they too were forgiven and adopted as children of God. The Gentiles were set free as heirs and received the Holy Spirit just like the Jews.

So both the Jewish background believers and Gentile background believers were set free from slavery to sonship and received the inheritance of the Holy Spirit. But now, under the influence of the Judaizers, they are turning back to slavery under the Law of Moses.

Paul is incredulous when he asks, "...how can you turn back again...?" (Gal. 4:9)

The Judaizers were enslaving those who had been set free.

In verses 12-20 Paul exposes the Judaizers' tactics: isolation and control.

Galatians 4:12–20

The Judaizers' tactics reveal they are not teaching the truth.

The Galatian believers have been set free from both the Law of Moses and idolatry and are now sons of God, indwelt by the Holy Spirit but the Judaizers are trying to enslave them again under the Law of Moses.

The Galatian believers enjoyed a loving, caring relationship with the Apostle Paul who still loves them very much but the Judaizers are driving a wedge between them and Paul and are trying to control the Galatians.

In the final paragraph of Galatians 4, Paul tells the Galatians to throw the Judaizers out! The Judaizers, still slaves under the Law of Moses, are persecuting the Galatians, who are sons of God, sons of promise. The story resonates with the Jewish background believers; it is the story of Ishmael and Isaac, sons of their father Abraham.

Galatians 4:21–31 (ESV)

Kick the Judaizers out of your churches!

The point of the allegory is that just as Hagar and Ishmael were sent away, so also, the Judaizers need to be sent away, cast out of the churches of Galatia. This would take real courage on the part of the Elders of these churches and it would come with a cost because certainly some members of their churches would have become persuaded by the Judaizers and would need to be put out of fellowship. To cast out the Judaizers would be very painful, but absolutely necessary to protect the true gospel of justification by faith in Christ alone.

This passage is important because it clearly teaches us who we are in Christ. If you are trusting in the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins and for eternal life, then you are a child of God. As the son and daughter of God you are His heir and as His heir you have received the Holy Spirit. You are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. He is the third person of the Trinity. He is a person with thoughts, feelings and will. The Holy Spirit is not your emotions though something He says or does may touch your emotions.

The Holy Spirit is absolutely critical and the key to our spiritual transformation. It is through Him that we are able to understand the meaning and application of the Bible to our lives. It is through the power of the Holy Spirit that we become like Jesus. As we learn to hear and obey the voice of the Spirit, it is He who develops in us both the character and the feeling state of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. The Holy Spirit gives each one of us at least one spiritual gift by which to minister to the church family and when we minister in our gifting, great blessing comes to the church family. It is the Holy Spirit who gives us the strength and courage to serve and speak for Christ in ways and in circumstances that we never thought we could. If you are discipling a new or young believer, be sure to help them learn how to relate to the Holy Spirit through Bible reading, prayer and listening.

Second, be wary of any group that is built around a personality or that seeks to isolate you from your family, friends and church. The same is true for a personal relationship; if the other person demands all your energy, time and attention and resents your relationships with others, something is wrong, it is not a healthy relationship. Isolation and control are tactics of cults such as David Koresh and Jim Jones and ultra legalistic Christian groups.

Third, resist anyone or any teaching that seeks to enslave you again to legalism. I am using *legalism* to refer to any teaching that we are either justified by keeping the law or a set of rules or that we become like Jesus by keeping the law or a set of rules. The truth is we are justified by faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ and we are spiritually transformed by faith in the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit within us. But there are many legalistic cults who will constantly come at you to try to enslave you again to legalism. Jehovah's Witness, Mormonism, Catholicism, Ultra-Fundamentalist Baptist Churches, Pentecostal Holiness Churches are all legalistic in their teachings.

We are sons and daughters of God. We are heirs. We have received the promised Holy Spirit - our inheritance! Let us move forward in the Spirit towards becoming more like Jesus. Let us not allow anyone to enslave us again to legalism!